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## Nonproliferation, Arms Control and Disarmament and Extended Deterrence in the New Security Environment

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To address the challenges of the emerging security environment and its impact on extended deterrence and assurance, there has been an effort in the United States to ensure it maintains capabilities for extended deterrence, to enhance assurances and to continue to pursue with allies non- and counter-proliferation and counterterrorism—including defenses and consequence management—as priorities. These and other activities are important to the US and its allies, and are essential to maintaining and strengthening the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) bargain. As the developments leading to the ban treaty suggest, the political requirement for dealing with calls for disarmament in the NPT context is indisputable.<sup>2</sup> This may not have been the understanding of the negotiators of the treaty, but it is today's reality.

The worsening security environment points to the continuing need for deterrence and its extension to friends and allies, while highlighting the importance of nonproliferation, arms control and disarmament as responses. What are the relations between extended deterrence, arms control and disarmament and nonproliferation?

In his Prague speech, President Obama reiterated the pledge of the United States to defend its allies. It was in this context that he spoke of "America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons."<sup>3</sup>

There had been some anxiety from some US allies under nuclear guaranties about the Obama administration's interest in a world free of nuclear weapons, especially among the members in the east and France. These concerns were exacerbated by the views of some allies that the commitment to disarmament was weakening NATO's resolve at a time that US nuclear weapons in Europe was being intensely debated in NATO as well as in several key member states. The administration's response to the humanitarian impacts movement and

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed are the author's own and not those of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the Department of Energy or any other agency.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to recall that arms control and disarmament efforts have a rationale independent of nonproliferation and the NPT, as discussed in the classic by Thomas Schelling and Morton H. Halperin *Arms Control* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

behavior at the 2010 NPT Review conference was also seen by some as offering less than forceful defense of deterrence. However, it was the case that achieving the concrete steps proposed in the Prague speech—which were modest and had been US policy in the Clinton or Bush administrations—likely would not have threatened nuclear deterrence or its extension to allies and friends, which as noted were reiterated in the call for a nuclear free world.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Obama administration enhanced consultations with allies and took steps to assure them, including visits to Los Alamos. In the end, the allies debated these issues during Obama’s presidency and ratified the importance of maintaining nuclear deterrence on more than one occasion.

The Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review, the stalemate in bilateral arms control and the US decision to withdraw from the INF treaty in response to Russian violations have reaffirmed the fact that there is little prospect for movement in the arms control arena in the foreseeable future.

Initial allied reactions to the US INF withdrawal decision suggest a debate is already being engaged. Despite Russian violations and a rejection of US efforts to discuss the INF treaty over the past two administrations, many allied leaders and experts are criticizing the Trump INF decision as threatening to their security. To the extent this debate plays out, it will focus on other allied concerns than those highlighted during the Obama administration. It will not engage deterrence directly, but could enter that realm to the extent that concerns about an increased threat become the dominant view.

The ban treaty could raise directly once again the relationship of deterrence to disarmament, as the treaty *inter alia* condemns deterrence as well as possession and use. This could become a real issue, especially if states enjoying a security guarantee consider joining or actually adhere to the treaty.

The future of arms control has rarely looked worse than it does today, and its impending collapse has been widely predicted, long before the Trump INF decision. However, if arms control remains a mutual interest of the US and

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<sup>4</sup> As reassurance requires addressing the security concerns of allies, to the extent that Russian and possibly other arsenals are drawn down, and especially if Russian nonstrategic forces are addressed, the proposed steps would reduce at least some of the nuclear threats that confront the alliance and thereby enhance its security. A positive turn in US- and NATO- Russian relations would also provide security benefits.

Russia, and I believe this is the case, at some point noncompliance could be addressed and negotiations resume. Should this occur, the potential for the direct impact of reduced forces and capabilities on extended deterrence will likely be raised again. If it is, both extended deterrence and an interest in further reductions can in reality be achieved, albeit not without tensions.

Despite the risks to extended deterrence and assurance from a declaratory commitment to disarmament, any real threats would likely arise only at the point where a state is getting to, or very near, the end point of a nuclear-free world, which is difficult to imagine at present. It would seem to require a fundamental change in the relations among states. Progress would be desirable and probably needed at least in:

- Reducing further the role of conflict and war in international affairs;
- Improving regional conflict management;
- Controlling nonnuclear armaments in some fashion; and
- Strengthening nonproliferation and other threat reduction efforts, and resolving outstanding WMD proliferation cases.

There would also be a need to agree on acceptable verification measures and on enforcing compliance—because verification cannot be perfect and the stakes are high. These are the issues that need to be discussed when talking about “conditions” for arms control or disarmament, whether or not we get to this stage.

What will be critical if we believe reaching this point is possible is the establishment of an incremental process that ensures the security of the United States along with its friends and allies at every step. This requires full consultations with the allies, their inclusion in broader strategic dialogues with the nuclear powers and others and attention to their security concerns at the regional, subregional and national levels at every point in the process.

Under any circumstances, nonproliferation is essential. Nuclear guarantees have been seen as having nonproliferation benefits for over fifty years, and nonproliferation and arms control help efforts within the alliance to maintain a credible nuclear policy, which is essential. If we do not reach the goal of a nuclear-free world, we will have to continue to deter and to assure. If we have some successes in further reductions, nuclear deterrence will remain essential for decades or longer.

Some hold that conventional deterrence will allow the United States to forego nuclear deterrence, at the very least in most contingencies. Conventional

weapons can indeed replace certain nuclear missions and have done so, and they will increasingly figure in future deterrence calculations. However, the historical record of conventional deterrence is not encouraging and the experience of the last two decades is mixed at best. Even if the United States and its allies could accept conventional capabilities as a hedge to reduce the risks of deeper reductions, other nuclear-weapon states will not and will not be able to do so. It would make disarmament less likely, not more.

Virtual deterrence also has problems and uncertainties. Latent capabilities will exist even if a nuclear-free world can be achieved. Shutdown programs can be reconstituted; civil nuclear programs can be used, or misused, to make weapons. Capabilities may cast a deterrence "shadow," but an effective virtual arsenal would almost certainly require, among other things, human capital and facilities that cannot just be "mothballed" and will need to be exercised if they are to have any real deterrent value. This may appear threatening and raises questions about crisis and arms control stability at the least. The acceptance of such a strategy as disarmament by nonnuclear-weapon states and NGOs is not likely.

The longstanding and continuing debates in NATO and with other allies--between fears of a US condominium with the Soviet Union and then Russia that ignored allied interests and security concerns on the one hand and fears of arms races, increasing tensions and the prospect of conflict on the other--affirm that the political, military and technical feasibility and impacts of further reductions and disarmament on deterrence will continue to need to be addressed by the United States and its allies. The pursuit of deterrence, nonproliferation and arms control in the context of efforts to reduce arms is possible and has been the policy of the US and its allies for decades. It is also, most probably, a political necessity. It will be critical to consult within the US alliances and to move in a way that does not undermine deterrence, as deterrence offers order, stability and nonproliferation benefits and may even make the possibility of progress more realistic. Navigating this path will be difficult, but it can result in near-term security benefits and NPT diplomatic successes.